

THE INTERPRETATION OF INFORMATION AND THE BIAS OF EDUCATORS IN THE ANTEBELLUM SOUTH

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The physical enslavement of the Africans and African Americans necessitated, to a certain degree, the control of their worldview. Chains about the body were unable to quench the inborn desire for liberty and autonomy. The propaganda of African "mental" inferiority, though it was proffered on every front, outlived its validity. Slaves proved themselves to be intellectually equal and in some cases superior to whites. Therefore, educative methods were employed for the purpose of controlling their reality. Religion and spirituality, as witnessed by the presence of the conjurer, was fundamental to the slaves' way of life. Religion gave adequate access and Christianity, with its proselyting ethos, provided a complementary motif for the indoctrination of slaves. Therefore, the education of adults for the purpose of establishing a Caucasianized worldview, not only for slaves, but also for masters, and the Old Southern community at large, came tinted in Christian hue. The most imminent schema of this systematic indoctrination as it related to slavery was to convince slaves, masters and the society at large that ignominious practice of slavery was not only justifiable but also necessary.

Thus the conflation of Christianity and educating the adult slave fostered a perfect model for the extension of the Southern Aristocracy. Paradoxically, this very conflation violated, what some thought to be the fundamental tenets of Biblical philosophy. Emancipatory meanings and conclusions emerged from the study of the Christian documents. Many slaves, and some whites, saw the God of the Bible as the God of the oppressed not the God of the oppressor. Whites fought along side blacks with the Bible as the magnum opus for slave liberation. A subtle and deliberate process of reinterpretation and reeducation within the context of Christianity took place in the slave community. The Christian religion and education was again conflated but this time for the purpose of liberation. The quintessential question therefore is: how were Christianity and adult education used as methods for perpetuating the philosophy of white supremacy, by extension black bondage and oppression in the Antebellum South, while simultaneously providing an avenue for liberation?

The Bible was the direct source of educational influence. To the aristocracy, and those sympathetic to the doctrine of race-based classism, the Bible justified the cognitively dissident concept of human-chattel. To most slave-preachers, abolitionist, and those sympathetic to the plight and posterity of African and African American peoples in the United States, the Bible propagated the liberation of slaves. In some cases, the Biblical bias was markedly subservient to the educative predisposition of its interpreters. Each group of educators found in the Bible, information that was pliable enough to be molded to suit their societal allegiance, and out of those discolorations they presented their theme as the ultimate law of Deity. Hence, on the one hand the Bible and Christianity was used to substantiate and prolong slavery and on the other its ethos was the liberation of enslaved peoples.

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